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## NEW BOOKS REVIEWED.

BY BRANDER MATTHEWS, LAWRENCE GILMAN  
AND JOSEPH H. COATES.

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### THE DEVELOPMENT OF SHAKESPEARE.\*

A RECENT French biographer of Ben Jonson has drawn attention to the suggestive fact that in dealing with Shakespeare, the English seem to admire chiefly the poet, while the French are mainly interested in the psychologist, and the Germans in the philosopher. Perhaps it is to be left for us Americans to be active in paying proper attention to Shakespeare the playwright, and in analyzing his slow attainment of mastery in the difficult art of the professional dramatist, writing plays intended to be performed in a theatre by actors and before an audience. That Shakespeare was a playwright, first and foremost, and before he was a poet or a psychologist or a philosopher,—this is the principle that sustained the stimulating volume Professor Barrett Wendell published some ten years ago. And now Professor Baker pushes the inquiry further. In this book he seeks to trace the development of Shakespeare's dramaturgic skill and to show how he learned the art and craft of the playmaker.

As a preliminary Professor Baker is forced to consider the audiences whom Shakespeare had to please, the theatre to the conditions of which his plays had to conform, and the actors who were to impersonate his characters. As yet no scholar has put into a single treatise all the needed information about the English theatre under Elizabeth, like that which Mr. Haigh has massed together in his excellent book on the Attic theatre and like that which the late Eugène Despois collected in his invaluable volume on the French theatre under Louis XIV. Prob-

\* "The Development of Shakespeare as a Dramatist." By George Pierce Baker. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1907.

ably the time has not yet arrived when our knowledge is secure enough to warrant such a book, although much of the ground has been covered in the third volume of Dr. Mantzius's "History of Theatric Art" and in Dr. Reynolds's "Principles of Elizabethan Staging." And no one has attacked the difficulties of explaining what the Elizabethan theatre was like and how plays were acted on its platform with a more minute knowledge and a more robust common sense than Professor Baker in these pages.

His conclusions may seem radical to readers who are not familiar with the more recent discussions; but they are in accord substantially with those held by nearly all later investigators. The stage for which Shakespeare wrote was a platform thrust out into the yard. It had no scenery whatever; but it had abundant "properties,"—thrones, well-heads, arbors, and so forth. It had a curtain hung from the gallery over the back of the stage, arras or cloth painted in imitation of tapestry. It may have had sometimes some kind of painted cloth in the gallery. It may have had also a curtain suspended from the "heavens," the pent-house roof that protected part of the stage from the rain. It had two or more doors, either permanent or temporary; and sometimes there may have been placards on these doors to indicate that they were the entrances to distinct places. But there is no warrant whatever for the oft-repeated assertion that changes of scene were indicated by changing a series of hanging signs,—*"This is a street in Venice," "This is the palace of the Duke," "This is the Rialto."*

As Professor Baker declares, we cannot rightly appreciate the accomplishment of Shakespeare as a dramatist unless we are able to visualize his stage, to understand the public for which he wrote and to know what was his inheritance of dramaturgic technic. What had Shakespeare's immediate predecessors trained that public to expect on that stage?—because it was this expectation which Shakespeare in his 'prentice days had to satisfy. What devices of situation, episode, plot, suspense and surprise could his predecessors employ on that stage to interest that audience?—because Shakespeare had to begin where his predecessors left off; he had to stand on their shoulders. It is this dramaturgic technic, this primitive method of playmaking, inherited by Shakespeare from Marlowe and Kyd, from Lyly and Greene, which the young Shakespeare had first to master and to make his own, which

he had then to improve as he gained confidence and authority, and which he had finally to perfect as his powers ripened and he grew in strength.

Of course, it is impossible here even to summarize the results of Professor Baker's minute analysis of Shakespeare's slow and steady development as a dramaturgic artist. A poet Shakespeare was by the gift of God; a psychologist he became by observation and intuition; a philosopher he rose to be as the result of reflection and insight; but a playwright he made himself, by hard work, by absorption of every available trick of the trade which his predecessors and contemporaries had devised, and by constant and adroit experimenting of his own. In playmaking he was a conscious and deliberate artist, profiting by every possible effect permitted by the rude yet liberal playhouse of his time, and keeping in mind always the desires, the expectations and the prejudices of the sturdy and robust Elizabethan audiences, whom he had ever in his eye, even though he never gave a glance forward to us to-day.

This is what Professor Baker makes clear in his illuminating chapters, wherein he sets forth certain of the steps by which Shakespeare taught himself how to put together the framework of farce and of melodrama, and by which he rose in time to the more difficult construction of true comedy and of real tragedy. And in making these things clear, Professor Baker has, unintentionally perhaps, knocked the support from under countless labored disquisitions, largely of German authorship, which undertook to declare Shakespeare's theoretic system and his philosophical intention. The American critic brings out the fact that Shakespeare was no theorist and no maker of systems; and he suggests that not only to his contemporary audiences, but even to the dramatist himself, his great tragedies may have seemed only chronicle-plays better made, more compact, and therefore more interesting. Distinctions of type, which are important to the critic and to the historian of literature, are rarely present in the mind of the creator himself, who is satisfied to seek self-expression within the limitations imposed upon him by the conditions of his time, and who is often unconscious of his own enlargements of the art he is practising.

The illustrations which are scattered through the volume ought to have been massed in the earlier chapters. They consist

of maps and views of London in Shakespeare's time. They include, also, a valuable series of drawings of Elizabethan theatres, inside and out, and of later attempts to reproduce what is now believed to be the Elizabethan stage. They would have gained in value if they had each of them been dated, and if the sources had been carefully indicated. Apparently the lower of the two drawings facing page 200 is modern, and therefore without authority.

BRANDER MATTHEWS.

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MR. SHAW'S NEW VOLUME OF PLAYS.

DESPITE the cloud of controversial and expository dust which he has managed to raise along the highways of criticism, there is really only one authentic way of regarding Mr. Bernard Shaw. It is as otiose to view him as a dazzling and unscrupulous, though somewhat perturbing, mountebank, as it is to consider him a prophet and philosopher whose every dictum is to be accepted absolutely *au sérieux*. He has generously given us his conception of the "quintessential" Ibsen, and of the essential Wagner: well, the essential and quintessential Shaw is not a more recondite being than is either of the two masters whom Mr. Shaw himself has so elaborately exposed. We all know that he has derived infinite joy from a knowledge of the fact that he is very widely regarded, among a class of persons whom he quite honestly despises, as being somewhat in the same case as his *Andrew Undershaft* in "Major Barbara," of whom the excellent *Lady Britomart* observes that he is "always most clever and unanswerable when he is defending nonsense and wickedness." That is a conception of himself which Mr. Shaw is far from averse to fostering, and it suggests, for all who care to apply it, the key to a just and verifiable apprehension of him. Mr. Shaw is an Irishman of intellect—an enormously significant condition. His intellectual processes are colored by imagination, while his imagination is tempered and constrained by a quality of intellect that is at once pep-tonizing and astringent. He is at bottom a poet, a man of amazing intensity and sensitiveness of feeling; but he is also a moralist with an insatiable and inextinguishable sense of comedy: a more painfully and utterly inharmonious blend of characteristics than which it would be difficult to conceive. It follows, quite simply and as a matter of course, that Mr. Shaw is forced into a nervous